The Qualities of Being Human
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by HADLEY CANTRIL

who, as Stuart Professor of Psychology, Chairman of the Department of Psychology, and Director of the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University, has directed his major interest toward systematic social psychology.

The Qualities of Being Human*

IN his letter of May 14, 1743, Benjamin Franklin enumerated a number of subjects that might be discussed by members of an American Philosophical Society, the creation of which he was then proposing. Along with such topics as exchanges of information concerning "improvements of vegetable juices," "inventions for saving labour," and the "course and junctions of rivers," he included as a final aim the consideration of "all philosophical experiments that let light into the nature of things"

A year and a half later Franklin wrote from Philadelphia to one of his friends that "the members [of the society] here are very idle gentlemen." But as we all know, those who have taken it upon themselves to investigate "into the nature of things" have not been completely idle and have let considerable light in during the past 200 years.

Yet as a psychologist accepts the challenge of beginning discussions on "A Portrait of Western Man" and reviews the accumulated data of his discipline, he must in all honesty confess at the outset that in the brief history of his science the subject of man as a living, striving, anxious, hopeful, curious, valuing, prayerful organism has been somewhat neglected.

I have often wondered if Whitehead did not have psychologists particularly in mind when he wrote that "the intimate timidity of professional scholarship circumscribes reason by reducing its topics to

*Opening lecture in the Benjamin Franklin Lectures for 1953, sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania under the general heading, "A Portrait of Western Man." An article based on another lecture in this series—by David Riesman—appeared in the last issue of the QUARTERLY. The point of view sketched here has been developed in the course of research and communion especially with Adelbert Ames, Jr., and also with W. H. Ittelson, F. P. Kilpatrick, C. H. Bumstead, and Earl Kelley.

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triviality, for example, to bare sensa and to tautologies. It then frees itself from criticism by dogmatically handing over the remainder of experience to an animal faith or a religious mysticism, incapable of rationalization."[1]

The kind of scientific inquiry that has so far largely characterized Western Man's probing of his own nature has been traced back to Descartes by René Fülöp-Miller in his book *Science and Faith in the Crisis of Our Time*.[2] In this book we learn of an incident in Descartes' life which still seems to haunt many of today's investigations. It appears that one time when Descartes was visiting the King, he was impressed by an elaborate automaton set up in the King's garden according to the fashion of the times. A figure of the Goddess Diana adorned a fountain and when a hydraulic mechanism was released, the figure left the fountain, bathed in the surrounding pool of water, hid briefly in the adjoining shrubbery and then resumed her position on the fountain. A very complicated machine indeed; and Descartes, so the story goes, decided that if this tin girl could do all of these things, then really the human being himself was nothing more than a machine, only infinitely more complicated.

Since then, many investigations concerning the nature of man have been saddled with Descartes' conception of a mechanistic determinism. But a quick glance at some of the conclusions of modern science—or what the philosopher would call some of its most general specifications—justifies our hope that the study of man *can* be approached from a new perspective. These conclusions of modern science have enabled us to expand the base of what we call scientific inquiry so that the very qualities of being human are not ruled out as variables for our study.

Modern physics, dealing with the inanimate aspects of nature, teaches us that our traditional conceptions of matter must be seriously revised. For the physicist today, matter does not exist. All that does exist is activity—an activity constantly changing into new forms and never repeating. The modern physicist denies the existence of a complete determinism. He speaks of the "principle of indeterminism." He further recognizes that man's knowledge of inanimate nature is limited by man's own limited point of view as a particular kind of living organism.

Modern biology recognizes the invariability of certain basic characteristics of organic nature which remain relatively stable in biological time in spite of the ever-changing characteristics of the inorganic world.

[1]Alfred N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1933), p. 151.

[2]René Fülöp-Miller, *Science and Faith in the Crisis of Our Time* (New York: Scribner, 1953).

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The biologist points out that these characteristics are stored in every living organism which acts as a carrier into the future. The biologist recognizes that every human being is unique in terms of his own chromosome structure and in terms of his own life experiences. The biologist recognizes that every human being is also different from every other human being in any particular occasion of life, and, furthermore, that in every occasion of living an individual is different from what he was before or what he will be after the occasion.

From modern psychology we learn that there is no rigid dichotomy between what has been called "subjective" and what has been called "objective." What we experience as "out there," as "outside of ourselves," does not exist in its own right with certain inherent characteristics which are somehow "disclosed" to us without our own participation as experiencing organisms. We know from modern psychology that what we experience "out there" in our environment is not permanent or determined but varies in its characteristics with the subjective state of the organism. We know that the environment is uniquely different for every individual. We know that every act of behavior an individual participates in alters him uniquely at least in some small way.

This advance of science on many fronts in the past few decades has completely destroyed the myth which most Western men had held concerning permanence and stability—permanence and stability not only of their universe but of their moral codes and of themselves. Instead of this false certainty modern science finds everywhere, as Julian Huxley has described it, a "self-transforming pattern and continuing process." There is ceaseless activity, with no one process ever repeating itself exactly. Permanence, John Dewey has pointed out, must be defined as change which takes place so slowly that we cannot observe it.

Now if we try to summarize in a very general way what all of this means in terms of a new perspective, we might say, simply, it means that what has happened *has* happened and is determined, unchangeable; it also means that what *will* happen, what is *going to* happen, is undisclosed, novel. It means further that what *is* happening in what we call "now" is that our experience of the present, like an ocean wave, is a fleeting transition, an aspect of a flowing process that connects the past with the future. Laotze noted centuries ago that "What is is the was of what shall be."

This view of things is consistent with the philosophy of history represented by Charles Beard. In a note on Beard as philosopher-historian, Horace Kallen has pointed out that for Beard "civilization is an idea of a course of events whose openness is intrinsic . . . civilization is not an existence either given or implied by the nature of things; it is a creation

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of the human spirit."[3] Beard himself wrote that "the idea of civilization predicates a partial determinism, such as an irreversible and irrevocable historical heritage, and a partially open and dynamic world in which creative intelligence can and does work. . . ."[4]

From this perspective, then, let us reëxamine some of those age-old problems associated with the qualities of being human.

The Nature of "Motivation"

We can begin this inquiry by proposing a working definition of life. We shall define living as a process in which an organism participates in the creation of an environment through which it can carry out its purposes. This definition, I believe, gives us a general specification applicable to the bird building its nest, the salmon returning to the river, as well as the human being, whether child or adult, participating in the multifarious transactions of living.

In this participation in which we human beings try to create an environment through which to carry out our purposes, our relationship with the undisclosed future is a relationship in which we are constantly making bets, following hunches, guessing at probabilities which we feel, on the basis of our past experience in similar situations, will lead us to action which will enable us to experience the consequences we desire.

For all human beings whom we could call normal, living is thus a constant flow from established form. There is in all "normal" human beings an apparent craving for novelty, a desire to escape boredom and ennui. The human being wants to test his assumptions in new instances. He wants to experience new qualities of satisfaction. He wants to break away from fixed forms. It seems to be a characteristic of man that he is never satisfied with his lot. And the more he becomes tied up with the routine and boredom of fixed forms, the greater is his desire for flow and change.

We see this in the case of children who have had little chance for new experience and who are therefore prone to insubordination. We see it in the sabotage that goes on in regimented industry or in police states. We see it when we read our history and realize that no despotism has ever survived.

Each of us can see how in our own lives we are motivated by the desire to experience qualities of value which we feel will somehow be more satisfying than those which constitute our living so far. Let me cite an example taken from Justice Douglas' book, *Of Men and Mountains.* Douglas tells how he had to hitch rides on freight trains in order to

[3]Horace M. Kallen, "In Remembrance of Charles Beard, Philosopher-historian," *Social Research*, XXVIII (1951), 243.
[4]*Ibid.*, 246.

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get himself from the Yakima Valley in Washington to the Columbia Law School in New York. As a moving freight train was going through the Chicago freight yards, Douglas was forced by a brakeman to jump off. He was scratched and bruised, had only a few dollars to his name. He was hungry, tired, and homesick. He reports his thoughts as follows:

> Most of my friends and all the roots I had in life were in the Yakima Valley. There would be a job and a home awaiting me, and fishing trips and mountain climbs . . . it was a friendly place, not hard and cruel like these freight yards . . . I would be content and happy there. Then why this compulsion to leave the Valley? Why this drive, this impulse to leave the scenes I loved? To reach for unknown stars, to seek adventure, to abandon the convenience of home? And what of pride? What would I say if I returned? That I didn't have the guts to work my way East, to work my way through Law School, to live the hard way?[5]

Here we have an example of the quality of being human—the ceaseless striving for a more complete, a richer satisfaction in experience, the desire to experience new consequences of action we initiate.

Living, then, becomes a continuous series of transactions and for the human being is made up of an infinite variety and pattern of awarenesses, including such experiences as grief, surprise, anxiety, humor, accomplishment, joy, love, fear, and devotion, to mention only a few.

For the purpose of understanding the nature of these transactions it may be of use to us if we abstract them into different aspects. We must, of course, remember that this is an arbitrary differentiation and that each aspect is interrelated with every other; that no one aspect of experience functions except for the function it has served, now serves, and will continue to serve all other aspects.

One of these aspects of man's experience is what we might call "perceiving," that is, the bets we make of *what* the things are which we have learned to discriminate in our environment and of *where* these things are. These perceptions of ours become our directives for potential action relative to objects which we are able to separate out of the total environment in and through which we are carrying out our purposes.

Another aspect involves our sense of surety that certain consequences will follow certain events, that if one event takes place we can predict certain following events will occur. We can label this a "sequential" aspect—the assumptions we build up through experience and knowledge that one event is a sequence of another.

Then there is an aspect of experience involving our prediction of what kind of action will lead to the desired consequences. We make choices between the probable value satisfactions that will follow the

[5]William O. Douglas, *Of Men and Mountains* (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 15.

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pursuit of alternative types of behavior we might undertake. We can refer to this as the aspect of "purposeful action."

And permeating all these is that aspect of experience where we weigh or size up our potential behavior, consciously or unconsciously, in terms of its significance to our value standards. Obviously we seldom do anything just for the sake of doing it, we seldom accomplish a limited purpose just to accomplish that limited purpose. None of us gather together in a lecture situation just to participate in a lecture situation. We do what we do either because of the value satisfaction we experience in the doing, or because its accomplishment is of some importance to us as a step toward the fulfillment of further purposes involving still greater value satisfactions. We can label this the "valuing" aspect.

The oustanding quality of man's motivation, then, appears to be a desire to bring forth and to experience the value aspects latent in every concrete behavior situation. I hardly need point out that this is a very different perspective than we get when we take the usual impersonal "scientific" third person approach. For then we conceive of behavior as entirely a homeostatic reaction to a stimulus which has fixed properties —as an attempt only to reduce some physiological tensions. Then we find all behavior is determined since it is only determined behavior we have allowed ourselves to look for.

We are proposing, instead, that the central quality of being human is the creative search for new value satisfactions which serve as the initiators of behavior. We propose that this can only be experienced by the behaving individual who is bringing the determined of his own unique past to the undisclosed of his own unique present. This is not a flight into any form of vitalism, supernaturalism, or solipsism.

The Nature of Environment

In creating an environment through which to carry out his unique purposes, the human being has an amazing capacity to differentiate a variety of aspects out of the world which surrounds him. Among other things, man can learn the significance of certain sounds which he calls words, he learns the significance of a variety of organisms including other human beings, he learns the significance of ideas, of complicated symbols, of ideologies. He has the capacity to register these significances so he can use them at appropriate times.

Man is constantly making his environment more "human" by extending his understanding of the significances of events or happenings. The extent to which any one of us is aware of his environment is proportional to the extent to which he has been able to humanize it. From this point of view, we might say that instead of "conquering" nature,

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man essentially "humanizes" nature. A characteristic of man as an organism is that he is able to assign repeatability, significance, or meaning to a wider and more inclusive range of happenings than any other organism.

This view seems consistent with modern physics. In an article on "The Operational Aspect of Meaning," P. W. Bridgman concludes that

> in seeking the precision demanded by scientific use we have thus been led to discard the common sense method of handling our environment in terms of objects with properties, and have substituted for it a point of view that regards a reduction to activities or operations as a safer and better method of analysis. . . . What we are in effect doing in thus preferring the operational attack is to say what we *do* in meeting new physical situations has a greater stability than the situations themselves, and that we can go further without revising our operations than we can without revising our picture of the properties of objects. . . . Our methods of handling the external world have a greater stability than the external world itself.[6]

Just as we differentiate our environment into various objects because of the relationship they have to our purposeful activity, so too we differentiate people according to the potential significance they have for us—i.e., we call people farmers, bakers, bachelors, friends or enemies, etc. This is a quick and useful step we make for separation and classification.

A most important difference, however, between classifying objects and classifying people is that we have an awareness that people, unlike objects, have purposes and values that exist in their own right. Hence people become qualitatively vastly different from "objects"—people are sensed as more "real," as more "valueful." While we do not hesitate to destroy objects, we believe "thou shalt not kill."

Analysis of concrete behavioral situations from this general point of view enables us to get a somewhat better understanding of what really is involved in situations we characterize as "social" and that play so large a rôle in man's behavior. A person is "social" insofar as he experiences significances to events that other people are also experiencing as significances. This sharing of the significances of events provides the links except for which a social event would not be experienced and actually would not exist. The links that the sharing of significances provide and which operationally make a social event possible are analogous to the forces of attraction that hold the parts of an atom together, keeping each part from following its independent, individual course.

[6]Percy W. Bridgman, "The Operational Aspect of Meaning," *Synthese*, VIII (1950-51), 255-57.

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It would appear that we are able to grasp the potential significances of events with others only insofar as we experience the same events in phase with them and humanize these events more or less similarly by "assigning" similar significances to them. Many of us have had the curious experience, for example, of attending a football or baseball game with a foreigner who does not understand the rules of the game and who therefore can assign no significances to the actions he observes. In such a situation, it is impossible to share experience and to enjoy the occurrences taking place on the field with the quality of feeling we would have if our companion also knew what it was all about.

If we are to have a full-bodied experience of social relationship with other people, it therefore becomes necessary for us to sense the potential significances that *they* experience in an event as well as the significances *we* experience in the same events.

These significances we attach to other people, to symbols, or to ideologies, we label "attitudes" or "opinions." And if we have never tested these potential significances through our own action, then we are likely to be more or less anxious, to lack surety and confidence in our opinions.

This was nicely illustrated in a recent account of the conversations and speculations that took place on a ship bringing a number of elderly Italian people to begin life anew in America. Their journeys and immigrations were being sponsored largely by young relatives and friends already here. In reporting what he overheard among these people, the journalist wrote,

> . . . And the word that turned up most frequently in their conversation was "America." In colloquial Italian, "America" has come to mean something more than a geographical place. It is, by extension, any deposit of hopes, any tabernacle where all things too big, too difficult, too far beyond one's grasp take shape and become true—so true that all one needs in order to touch them is a ship that will take one there. "America" is, again, something one finds or makes, a stepping stone, a rung in the ladder that allows one to climb a little higher—not, of course, in the country called America but back home. "America" also means the treasure one finds when "America" (the rung in the ladder) is steadily under one's feet. Inevitably, the question that the old people asked one another, over and over, was "Is America *America?*"[7]

We can regard man's customs, rituals, mores, and laws as significances which man has registered and preserved so that more people may share the meanings of more events more continuously and more extensively. Thus they provide more permanent links to the social matrix. For example, in nearly every culture of the world, when a young man and

[7]Niccolo Tucci, "The Underground Settlers," *New Yorker*, XXVII (August 4, 1951), 24.

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woman fall in love with each other and decide they would like to spend the rest of their lives together, they go through the ritual we call "marriage." This wedding ceremony in nearly every culture is attended with some sort of unusual festivity, glamour, pomp or circumstance. People have recognized for centuries that this new relationship between the two individuals is a novel value experience for both of them which can take on greater value for the two direct participants, acquire greater meaning for them, and make for greater social stability if it is somehow solemnized. Furthermore, the marriage ritual also enables friends and relatives to share in this value experience.

The function of our modern mass media and a reason they spread so rapidly is obviously because they enable more people to share more experiences concurrently. Since this is the rôle we expect radio and television especially to play, we are apt to feel cheated if we learn that some of the things we hear or view turn out to be "canned."

As we go about the process of living, we seek out the participation of other people according to our assumptions of what events and aspects of the environment have become humanized and significant for them and will, therefore, be potentially available to us if we participate with them to carry out our own purposes. Thus if we are lost in strange territory, we will seek out a native to get our bearings; or if, as a research man, we are looking for the answer to a technical question, we will seek out a scientific colleague. On the other hand, if we are temporarily "lost" in knowing what is the right or the good thing to do—if we are lost in the value matrix—we will seek the advice of a trusted friend, of our spouse, or of a person whom we call wise.

From this point of view, the important rôle played by the humanities may be somewhat better understood. For when we are searching for the value significances *others* have experienced and that may provide *us* with more reliable guesses as to how to act, it is often completely irrelevant whether or not such individuals are contemporary with us. This is particularly true in the value aspect of experience. Through the boundaries of time and space, it is possible for us to commune with others concerning the potential value significances we are sensing as we go along in the process of living. Hence we may turn to the classics, to our favorite poets or composers, to our New Testament, when our standards of value need freshening or sharpening up, or when we have an overpowering sense of loneliness.

All of our loyalties and allegiances to others seem to be formed because of the demonstrated usefulness these other people have for us as we participate with them. This holds with the member of a family, a member of the union, a person who aligns himself with a certain political

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party, or with a certain church. When we cease to experience from our association with others a confirmation or extension of some aspect of our own world of experience, then we are likely to give up our participation, or, if it does continue for some reason, it becomes formal and empty.

The Nature of Choice

Now we come to the problem of choice. If we are to understand the qualities of being human, we must inquire briefly about the ancient question of "free will," about man's capacity to choose.

Our awareness is made up of kaleidoscopic patterns of significances. If we take the impersonal, third person point of view, we accept the conclusion that our awarenesses in any "now" are solely the result of the determinism of the past. But if we take the first person point of view proposed here, where the determinism from the past functions with the undisclosed of the present, then our awareness must somehow be concerned with the problem of choice.

Human beings have the capacity to choose. And the opportunity to exercise this capacity of choice cannot be denied man without violating his very nature. This is a fact about human beings which cannot be liquidated. Since the outstanding quality of human beings appears to be their capacity to participate in the creation of more satisfying value experiences, it is most important to recognize that in the process of choosing, the top criterion for choice is the probability of greater value satisfaction through actions that follow choice.

Man appears to make choices in all occasions of living except those that have become reflexive and habitual because of their high reliability from past performance. Choice plays a rôle in all of those situations where we face alternatives, where we have a sense of inadequacy, where we have made mistakes or where we have failed to derive from our experience the satisfaction desired. Most of the choices we make are not what we could describe as rational, intellectual, or logical. In most choice situations we do not reason out a decision to ourselves in any step by step fashion. Rather we exercise what Kallen terms our "ineffable intuition."

An uncertainty as to what choice to make or the fear of making any choice at all can lead to individual psychoses and to mass collectivism and give the individual or the group a sense of loss of freedom or a sense of freedom from freedom. But there is probably no such thing as freedom from freedom if men are to be themselves and to develop as nature has prescribed. This proposition is basic in our Western-Christian-Democratic heritage.

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Freedom is, of course, not an end in itself. The quality of freedom is measured by what a person does with it. What he does with his freedom, that is, the quality of his actions, depends on the quality of his purposes. Hence freedom always involves great personal responsibility; it is not license but the responsibility for the realization of human values through purposeful behavior.

All of us have a conviction that when we are deciding to do one thing rather than another, our choice is our own decision and no one else's. To deny a human being his right to exercise his capacity of choice thus becomes a cardinal sin. The concept of guilt found in the legal systems of most cultures—as well as the experience of guilt nearly all "normal" individuals have at times—is evidence of the human being's belief in the efficacy of personal choice with its accompanying sense of personal responsibility.

Among the variety of difficulties we encounter, where we must exercise choice, two types deserve special consideration in order to understand the qualities of being human.

When we ask ourselves the question, "What shall I do?", we may really be asking ourselves the question, "*How* should I do a particular thing?" On the other hand, the question, "What shall I do?", may mean "Why should I do a particular thing?"

From the long view of evolutionary history it would appear that two of the great steps made in the course of development were, first, when organisms developed the capacity to choose *how* to do a certain thing, as contrasted to automatic, tropistic, or reflex action; and second, when organisms developed the capacity to choose *why* to do a certain thing.

A "how-to-do" difficulty is encountered when we are not sure of the way to achieve a desired end. Here is a simple example. Suppose you want to drive to a certain town to see an old friend. Suppose you have never driven to this town before from your home. You approach a crossroad and don't know which way to go. You consult your road map, you look for a road sign, or you ask directions. In this case, you know *what* you want to do, but you don't know *how* to do it.

Now a hitch on the why or the "*what for*" level involves a decision concerning the goal to be achieved. Here is an example. Again, suppose you are driving along a highway. You approach a pedestrian who is thumbing a ride. You have to decide whether to stop and give him a lift, or to keep on driving. You can do either quite easily. There is no problem of *how* to accomplish whatever you decide to do. But you must decide *why* you should act in one way or another. In this situation, if

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you decide against giving the pedestrian a lift, to drive on is just as positive an action as to stop.

When you meet a difficulty on the "how-to-do" level and feel that you are unable to act in some way which will effectively accomplish a definite end, you analyze the situation. You use rational inquiry. You ask questions of others, you read directions, you examine the situation and try to understand it. In all these pursuits, you are essentially trying to discover what action will offer a fair probability of achieving a goal. This means that the particular directives useful in your inquiry must refer to, and be limited by, the situation of which you are now a part. You can act only from your own particular standpoint in time and space.

Modern scientific inquiry is the outstanding example of the process arising from encountering this type of difficulty. The intellectual formulations of science give more precision to our understanding of the relatively determined relationships of particular space-time frames of reference. The rôle of pure science is essentially that of extending man's awareness and knowledge of the heretofore unrecognized sequential phenomena of nature; while applied science extends the range of man's sequential behavior, his how-to-do's, through the creation of artifacts. The contributions of science, it should be noted, are contributions confined largely to the sequential matrix.

While knowledge and rational inquiry are sometimes useful in helping us extend the range of the cues we can take into account in deciding *what* goals to pursue and in anticipating the consequences of different courses of action, no amount of knowledge or of rational inquiry *alone* can throw any light on the nature of the end or purpose we are attempting to achieve. That is, knowledge and rational inquiry in and of themselves can give us no understanding of *why* we are doing what we are doing, of what we are doing something *for*.

When we try to decide *why* we should do one thing rather than another, we also go into a kind of "inquiry." But the process involved in such inquiry is totally different from the processes involved in the inquiries necessary for solving procedural difficulties. If we are in a situation where a difficulty is encountered in deciding *why* we should do one thing or another—or possibly why we should do anything at all—the process of inquiry can be described vaguely as "meditation," "contemplation," "communion with one's self," and the like. Inquiry here is a value inquiry. And value inquiry is intensely personal and unique. It involves what is the "me" built up from the past facing the transition of the present into the future as "I."

The function of this value inquiry is to provide us with a value judgment that will serve as a compass, a directive for action. In value inquiry

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we are seeking standards of rightness, wrongness, goodness, badness, beauty, decency, and the like, which will serve as signs indicating to us the nature of the probable value satisfactions we will experience by following a particular course of action. The standards we use and question in value inquiry concern our duties, our loyalties, our responsibilities. Hence the value judgments we reach through value inquiry involve "conscience," "charity," "humility," "love." The rôle of value inquiry is symbolized by the Hindu custom of marking one's self between the brows with ashes each day in order to be reminded of the "inner vision" provided by a "third eye"; it is reflected in our Western hymn which says, "Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom."

Christ and Gandhi may be taken as examples of individuals who were trying to create an environment in order to act on the "what for" value judgments emerging from their value inquiry. In order to indulge in the necessary value inquiry, Christ went to the top of the mountain and Gandhi had his day of silence.

We find in reading Gandhi's revealing autobiography that the function of prayer for him and a function of some of his fasts was to sensitize himself to cues that could be taken into account in the process of value inquiry in order to achieve the most reliable and satisfying value judgment. He was trying to take into account a synthesized phenomenon which he could feel, rather than abstracted aspects of a phenomenon he could grasp intellectually. And, as he says, it was only *after* what he calls his "instinct" had shown him a course of action was right that he tried to determine intellectually why it was right. Louis Fischer writes that "Gandhi always kept his eye on his objective, and when he could not see it he kept his eye on the spot where he thought it would appear."[8]

While most of us do not indulge in days of silence or prolonged fasts, certainly at times we have wanted to be alone so that we could mull things over. We apparently need to insulate ourselves in this way from immediate here and now conditions as we weigh those standards that are not bounded by time and space consideration. Such insulation allows our conscious and subconscious processes the widest possible range.

A problem for every individual and a problem for every group or society or ideology appears to be the problem of clarifying purposes and simplifying means. For it would appear that only insofar as an individual raises the level of his purposes can he minimize the annoyances of his life and "carry on" most satisfyingly. Only then can discrimination be improved and means become simplified by being judged in terms of more inclusive purposes. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* there is a verse: "The wise should perform tasks without attachment, yet with

[8]Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper, 1950), p. 221.

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as much ardor as the foolish, who are bound up in the results of their deeds—thus to the world shall they set an example."

Many people in Western society today do not recognize that knowledge and rational inquiry alone cannot give the answers to questions of why and what for. And the failure to make such a distinction may be one of the basic sources of Western man's bewilderment. We in America tend to think that if we are busy, we are effective; that we must always be doing something; that we must not "waste time." The Soviet citizen is systematically and officially discouraged from making a distinction between "how" and "why" by such devices as "organized leisure," which prevent the Russian people from having the time to ask, "What is all this really for anyway?"

While we in the West do appear to be ahead today in the area of rational inquiry, the people in the Far East seem to be ahead on inquiry concerning motives and directional insights. But it would also appear to be a somewhat fair generalization to say that the people in the East have traditionally sought their answer in a non-emergent world by substituting abstractions for concreteness, thinking that the answer could be found in contemplating or pursuing the abstraction itself without bringing it to life through action.

The Nature of Faith

There is a final characteristic of man to consider before our portrait of man can be at all complete. I refer to man's need for faith and man's capacity for faith.

Let me introduce the problem with an incident reported by Carl Sandburg in his book, *Always the Young Strangers.*

I have always enjoyed riding up front in a smoking car, in a seat back of the "deadheads," the railroaders going back to the home base. Their talk about each other runs free. . . . Once I saw a young fireman in overalls take a seat and slouch down easy and comfortable. After a while a brakeman in blue uniform came along and planted himself alongside the fireman. They didn't say anything. The train ran along. The two of them didn't even look at each other. Then the brakeman, looking straight ahead, was saying, "Well, what do you know today?" and kept on looking straight ahead till suddenly he turned and stared the fireman in the face, adding, "For sure." I thought it was a keen and intelligent question. "What do you know today—*for sure?*" I remember the answer. It came slow and honest. The fireman made it plain what he knew that day for sure: "Not a damn thing! . . ."[9]

[9]Carl Sandburg, *Always the Young Strangers* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 145f.

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This story nicely illustrates the point made earlier: that in the process of living we are constantly making bets, weighing probabilities, guessing at significances. We have to do this in a world where there is constant change and emergence, in a world where the nature of future activity is not entirely determined, in a course of events where civilization is an open system.

While we may realize intellectually as scientists and psychologists that the happenings around us and our own perceptions, prehensions, actions, and valuings are only probabilities, still we must behave in our everyday life as *if* some probable happenings were certainties. For we couldn't *act*, we couldn't survive if we did not make some definite fixed assumptions. For example, in carrying on the process of living, we have to assume as we are crossing a street, that what we perceive as an oncoming car *is* an oncoming car; we *have* to assume that certain friends *are* loyal, that certain people *are* honest; we have to assume that certain things *are* the right things to do, and that certain things *are* wrong.

Hence we tend to make absolutes out of probabilities in order to act effectively. Those repeatable happenings and relationships that we have found from our past experience can be relied upon we might call "*functional absolutes.*" On the value level, these functional absolutes provide the sustaining power which keeps us going—our faith that we *will* experience certain consequences and value satisfactions if we act in certain ways. We lose this faith when our action on the basis of these absolutes fails to give us the anticipated value satisfactions or goes counter to our experiences and observations. And when value standards are lost, then *we* feel lost.

Faith, then, becomes a sense of certainty concerning some significance we assign. It is not intellectualized and rationalized in our minds. It is more of a sensed awareness, a feeling. Hence it is generally expressed through poetry, music, prayer, or meditation.

These "functional absolutes" we cling to as tested guides of our own experience might usefully be contrasted to another kind of absolute: what we shall call "*abstracted absolutes.*" These abstracted absolutes are intellectual abstractions. We refer to them by such words as "law," "truth," "nature," or "God." They become meaningless in our own everyday lives, from our own personal behavioral centers, unless they consistently prove to be guides to effective action, that is action which leads to value satisfaction. Any political or religious system is bound to fail sooner or later insofar as it must prop itself up by abstracted absolutes which people find it impossible to use in living.

A functional absolute is never an end in itself but a goal which, once achieved, points to further emerging value satisfactions. A few days

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before his death, John Dewey said, "A goal is a sign post."[10] Quite a thing to be able to say when one is over 90 years of age.

I like to think that it was some such distinction as this between abstracted absolutes and functional absolutes that Jesus had in mind when he said, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, 'lo, here' or 'lo, there,' for behold, the Kingdom of God is within you."

In Summary

We have briefly sketched here four of the outstanding qualities of human beings. First, the unique qualities of their value experience as they participate in occasions of living and as they try through these occasions to make experience ever more satisfying.

Second, the unique capacity of human beings to create a world of meaning and significance as they humanize an otherwise neutral and undifferentiated environment.

Third, their amazing capacity to meet the indeterminism of living by making choices that range from simple motor adjustments to the highest ethical decisions.

And, fourth, the remarkable capacity of most human beings to sustain themselves through hardship, failure, uncertainties, and the stresses of life by sensing that only insofar as they keep plugged into the stream of events can they experience the good, the true, and the beautiful.

The personal and social problem of Western man, then, seems to be to discover for himself in terms of his own experience what value assumptions, what code of ethics, he can take as moral certainties and use as his functional absolutes in the changing world of today. It is the old question, "What faith shall we live by?" facing us in our unique situation in history.

In a Socratic dialogue, Benjamin Franklin wrote in his newspaper in 1730, "As the happiness or real good of men consists in right action, and right action cannot be produced without right opinion, it behoves us, above all things in this world, to take care that our opinions of things be according to the nature of things."[11]

[10]Communication from Earl Kelley concerning his last conversation with John Dewey.
[11]Taken from Carl Van Doren's *Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Viking, 1938), p. 87.

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